

A

# REVIEW

OF THE

# STATE

OF THE

# BRITISH NATION.

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Thursday, February 17. 1709.

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I Am now preparing the Materials for a long Discourse of Trade, which in the next Volume, beginning the First of next Month, I shall make more regular; I touch'd in my last upon the Affair of our Paper-Credit, *I shall return to it again*; but it comes in my Way, first to speak a little to the Affair of our Trade to *Africa*.

Before I enter upon it, I must premise one Thing, and enter my Protest, That neither in this or any other Branch I shall treat of, have I directly or indirectly the least Concern of my own; I speak neither for my self, or for any Body else, but shall to the best of my Judgment give a true State of that intricate Affair, for the undeceiving such as are prejudic'd on either hand, and for the preventing, if possible,

the Detriment the Publick may receive from the Animosities of divided Parties and interfering Interests.

I have observ'd very often the best Foundations in Trade that ever we have laid, and which had we united, we might have been too hard for all the World in; we have ruin'd and pull'd up by the Roots with our own Hands, and indeed who but our selves could have done it, and just thus we are doing here; and whoever pleases to give himself leave to look back upon the the whole Course of the *African* Trade ever since its Foundation in 1672, will find this very Contest between the Company and the Interlopers, or separate Traders, has been the Destruction and only Occasion of the Decay of that Trade—And let the Fault lie where

where it will, or who will be offended with me in this Discourse, I say, they have all been to blame, the Company, the separate Traders, and the Government too.

*First*, the Company and the separate Traders, *I name them both, because I will not charge it any where*, are inexcusably to blame in keeping up the Strife of Trade; Trade, when Rivals contend for it, is like the innocent Traveller, that falling between two Thieves, is murder'd in their falling out about the Booty: I am not to determine now, where the Cause of the Breach lies, but certainly the Effect of Rivals in Trade is always lessening the Trade first, then lessening the Profits by under-selling to ruin one another, and at last both are undone.

The Rival Companies to the *East Indies* were just in this Predicament; had they continued striving to out-do one another, out-sail, over-buy and under-sell, they had certainly by this Time reduc'd that Trade to so low a Profit, that it had been not worth while for any Body to trade thither, and at last they were driven into a Union by the forcible Necessity of their own Interest.

Again, I say, the Government of *England* has been to blame, and this I make out thus—When the late King *Charles II.* granted them a Charter exclusive of others Right, which was in 1672, had he back'd his own Act and Deed with his own Authority, and preserv'd the Power to them, the Form of which they obtain'd, he had made it a most flourishing and useful Branch of our Trade——But such was the Iniquity of the Times, that in Disfiance of the Laws and Constitution of the Company, and, if some *LYONS* are not in the Tower, by the Connivance of the Government it self, which also some say was not obtain'd for nothing, the Interlopers immediately began to invade the Company, and run away with the Trade.

From that time to this, these *Canaanites* have been in the Land and the Company has gone through innumerable Convulsions and Distractions on this very Account, till at last this very Strife has eat out the Vitals and Spirit of the Trade; and now if not

retriev'd by Parliament, it is in a fair way to be lost to be h.

If an exclusive Company was an Imposition upon Trade, an Invasion of common Right, a thing in it self ruinous to the Commerce; then the Government was in the wrong, and Tyrannical to grant; the Company were Encroachers and Monopolizers to accept, and the Interlopers in the right to invade these Privileges.

If an exclusive Company was not the Foundation only of the Trade to *Africa*, but the Life of its Prosperity, and the thing by which it has been preserv'd as well as improv'd; if its Foundation was Legal, its Privileges consist not with common Right, its Charters sufficiently and unexceptionably regular, and its Proceeding in the extent of its Authority was fair and just: Then the Interlopers were really and in strict reasoning both Enemies to the Trade in general, Resisters of the Laws of *England*, and Thieves upon their Neighbours Property; and they cannot take this ill from me, for the Censure lies only, where the Guilt lies; and as before, I am perfectly indifferent where that be

Now to come at a right Understanding of the Affair of the *African* Trade: I think two short Questions will decide it all; it is certainly the Business of those, that would be rightly inform'd of this Matter, to come directly to the Point, and make a true State of the Question, as short and as concise as they can——The Questions are,

1. Is the Trade to *Africa*, a useful, necessary, advantageous Trade to *Britain*, and such as ought to be preserv'd, Or is it not?
2. If this be agreed, then what is the properest Method for the carrying on this Trade, so as to make it most useful to us, whether in an exclusive Company or in an open Trade?

The People on both sides may make long Stories, and recriminate upon one anothers Conduct, call Knaves, &c. on both Sides, and both Sides be in the right, and both Sides be in the wrong; but when you come



to the Parliament of *BRITAIN*, and the Crisis of a Trade is before them: All these Clamours serve for nothing, the House must sink into the bottom of Things, examine the Merits of the Trade, not the Merits of the Trader; the Trade may merit to be preserv'd, tho' the Traders on both Sides had all merited the Gallows.

As this is to be the Debate of the House, so, Gentlemen, it shall be my Debate; and if this Stander-b can illuminate You Gamblers, it's to be hop'd your By-sight won't be the worse, for the Doctors being but a Quack; We have Mountebank Merchants as well as Mountebank Doctors, and these are as Ignorant a Dogmatick Pretenders, and as pernicious in Trade, as those are in Physick—— But he that fetches the Sore, is likelyest to heal the Wound, and that's my Work.

To the first Question, *Viz.* Whether is the Trade to *Africa*, a useful, necessary, advantageous Trade to *Britain*, and such as ought to be preserv'd, Or is it not?

I must humbly take leave to answer in the Affirmative, and I prove it in the following Head.

1. It makes the best Export, and the best Import of any Trade we drive; it exports nothing, but what we want to part with, and it Imports nothing but what we can not be without.

To export the Growth of our Land, or our Manufacture, which is the Employment of our Poor, is the best Export respecting our Advantage that is possible to be made, since every Pound Value of the Growth or Produce of Land, or Employment of the People, is so much clear Gain to the Publick Stock, abating only so much as the subsistence of those People so employ'd amounts to; the Manufactures and Provisions Exported by the *African* Trade make out this Part.

Again, to return Bullion or Money, or something, the Necessity of which to us, is such, as that we must otherwise buy it

with our Money, is certainly the best Return any Trade can make, and the Returns from *Africa* in Gold, Ivory, Bees-Wax, Red-Wood and Negroes, make good this.

2. It is the chief Support of another Trade, the Preservation of which, is of the last Consequence to *Britain*, *Viz.* our Colonies in *America*, which could no more be maintain'd, the *Islands* especially, without the supply of *Negro* Slaves carried thither from *Africa*, Than *London* could subsist without the River of *Thames*.

I believe, therefore, I need spend no more time on this Head; I am perswaded there are no Head so dull, or Thought so dark in the great Assembly of the Nation, as to let this require any long Debate.

The Second Question is, If this be agreed, Then what is the properest Method for the carrying on this Trade, so as to make it most useful to us, Whether in an Exclusive Company, or in an open Trade?

And this indeed is the great Question before us— To come to the bottom of this Question, it would be needful to enquire, how this Trade was first carried on, and why, and on what Occasion it came at first, as well as frequently since, to be settled in a Company?

The Continent of *Africa*, I mean this Western Coast of it, was first taken Possession of by the *Portuguese*, then by the *Dutch*, *English*, *French*, &c.

The first Traders, as in all like Cases, made little Advantage, the Elephants Teeth, Wax, and Gold, were the first Purchase, and for this the Trade lay only to *Africa*, and directly back to *Europe*: The Custom of buying Slaves, came not into Practice till afterwards, when the Colonies planted in *America* encreasing, and wanting hands, the *English* found the *African* Negroes very useful there, and so began to carry them to *Virginia*, *Barbadoes*, &c. and at last to all the Colonies, as it is at this time.

When

When the *Portuguese* first planted there, they found the Natives, Wild, Barbarous, Treacherous, and perfectly untractable as to Commerce, and therefore to maintain the Trade, which they found profitable, they made little Settlements there; but finding the Natives frequently insulted, plunder'd, and sometimes Murther'd the Agents and People they left there: They found it at last necessary to fortify themselves, and maintain their Possession by force, and so keeping the Natives at a Distance, preserv'd both themselves and their Trade.

All the other Nations who have settl'd there since the *Portuguese*, have found this the only Method to carry on that Trade, and the several Persons whom they have ventur'd among the Natives, on attempts of meer Trade, presuming upon the most Civiliz'd Part of them, have yet been so generally Murthered and lost, that those Dear Experiments have taught us, *if we please to learn* this Maxim in the *African Trade*, that it is no way to be carry'd on but by Force; for a mere Correspondence with the Natives as Merchants, is as impracticable, as it would be if they were a Nation of Horses.

Now the Consequence of this is to our Purpose thus; The Trade requiring settled Factories, with Agents, Servants, and Factors to reside there; their Safety requir'd Force, that Force requir'd Forts, Castles, and Strengths, with Garrisons, Magazines, &c. to be maintain'd; and these again requir'd Societies of Men to manage, direct, and make it their Care; and publick Stocks, &c. to support and defray the Expence, as well as Commerce; and this drove the Merchants by the meer Nature of the Thing to joyn together in Stocks; and to seek Power, Protection and Authority to act when so joyn'd, was as natural as the other; and thus began a Company.

In short, The *African Trade* was first carry'd on in a Company from this very good Reason, *Viz.* That IT COULD be carry'd on NO OTHERWISE——— And that Reason will for ever hold good, why it should still be carry'd on by a Company.

It remains to examine, what Sort of a Company, whether such as is demanded now or no? And here I shall come of Course to examine, what we call exclusive Privileges, the Grounds and Reasons of them, Objections and Defences on either side; and if I prove, that the Invasion of the exclusive Privileges on one hand, and the Mistakes of exclusive Powers, and their not being duly executed on the other hand, have been the only Cause of the present Decay and Disorders of the Trade to *Africa*, it will naturally follow, that the only Way to revive that useful Trade, is to revive the first and necessary Constitutions, and put them into a regular Management.

I shall also examine some of our new projected Schemes of committing the Forts and Castles in *Africa* to the Government, and perhaps some insuperable Difficulties may appear in that, so as to explode it, and make it be no more talk'd of——— But of these in their Order.

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